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Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

EXCERPTS:

3. Verifying Arms Tests

Q. Mr. President, can you provide any more enlightenment on our ability to verify SALT and are those within the Administration who say this ability is say from one to four years away, are they wrong?

A. Well the Secretary of Defense made a statement concerning one year. That was applying to specifically how rapidly we could overcome the setback resulting from the loss of our Iranian monitoring stations. But in the same brief statement he replied to a news question that as soon as the SALT treaty is effective, when it's signed and ratified, we would be able to verify the treaty adequately.

There is no doubt in my mind that that is the case. I would not sign nor present to the Congress or to the American people any treaty which in my opinion could not be adequately verified from the first day it's effective. Many of the concerns that we have relate to very complicated questions. For instance, we can't guarantee that everytime a test missile is launched by the Soviet Union that every aspect of that flight can be completely comprehended by us.

There are limits on what we can do. But as the Secretary of Defense has testified publicly, in order for the Soviets to develop any kind of significant new missile they would have to have something like 20 to 50 test launchings. And during that process, it is a very high likelihood that we ourselves would be able to detect any violation of the SALT treaty.

There's another factor that must be considered. If the only purpose of the Soviet Union in the long, tedious negotiations of a SALT treaty is to have a document that they can violate, and that the only purpose in existence is to violate the SALT treaty, would make our problem much worse.

But there is an element of rationality and stability because the Soviets know that if we ever detect any violation of the SALT agreement, that that would be a basis on which to reject the treaty in its entirety. There would be a possible termination of the good relationship between our country and the Soviet Union on which détente is based, and it might very well escalate into a nuclear confrontation. So the consequences would be very severe and that is an additional constraint imposed upon the Soviet Union and on us that strengthens my statement that we can verify. But as for that very important factor, we can still verify to our complete satisfaction the SALT agreement through

4. Abiding by Arms Pact

Q. Mr. President, you've been quoted by historian James MacGregor Burns as saying that even if the SALT treaty is rejected by the Senate that you would abide by its terms. I would like to know how far you would go in this. Would you for instance abide by the limitations on the range of land-and-sea based cruise missiles and more generally don't you think abiding by a treaty that's been rejected by the Senate would amount to thwarting the will of the public?

A. I have no inclination to minimize the importance of the constitutional processes whereby treaties are negotiated by the executive and ratified or rejected by the Senate. My belief is that the treaty will be sound enough when it's completely scrutinized by the public and the Senate that it will be ratified. If because of some factor that I cannot anticipate the treaty is not ratified, then I would do all I could, monitoring very closely Soviet activities to comply with the basic agreements reached.

It would certainly not be proper for me if the treaty were not ratified to immediately launch our country into a massive nuclear arms race and the constraints placed on me and the Soviet Union, monitored very carefully by each other, would be a basis on which to constrain ourselves and to avoid such a nuclear confrontation in the absence of a treaty. But I still believe that we will have the treaty.

10. Turner Role; Oil Profit

Q. Mr. President, on Capitol Hill today a number of Republican senators who say that they are uncommitted on SALT 2 were critical of Admiral Turner, the director of the intelligence. They claimed that he has been making speeches around the country in support of the treaty and they feel that he should not get involved in what may become a partisan issue. What is your understanding of Admiral Turner's role? Is he an advocate of SALT 2 and if so is this at your direction?

A. No, I've never asked him to make any such speech. I think as is the case with almost every official in the Federal Government, in the executive branch at least, we are called upon to make speeches on matters of great moment and importance to the people. Even in the case of the C.I.A. director responsible for intelligence, he's not confined just to expressing an opinion on collection techniques, most of which are highly secret in any case. I don't know what comments Admiral Turner has made. I happen to know that he's basically in favor of the SALT treaty.

I might say to get back to the previous question about the Congress's attitude toward the windfall profits tax: It's not an easy question to address, but we've made a lot of progress in the last two weeks. When the windfall profits tax was first mentioned, when I started talking about it back in April, there was an almost unanimous opinion expressed on Capitol Hill that no windfall profits tax could be passed. And those of you in the media reported these comments. And now some of those very same people who said that it was not possible for a windfall profits tax to be passed at all are now quarrelling about whether we should take from the oil companies 29 cents out of each dollar or 25 cents or 24 cents or whatever. But I think we've made great progress in the last two weeks in selling to the American public and therefore to the Congress the need for the windfall profits tax just because I have spoken out strongly and fervently and with deep feeling on the subject. So we're making good progress. And I'm eager to work with the Congress on how to make my proposals even better.